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AUTHOR Shelton, Carolyn
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ABSTRACT

In Kansas, paraprofessionals have very specific roles and responsibilities in special education, and increasingly, in classes for severely handicapped and deaf blind students. Paraprofessionals have instruction responsibilities under the supervision of the classroom teacher. Additional duties include assisting with supplementary work for advanced pupils, helping prepare instructional materials, scoring objective tests and papers, and working with individuals or small groups on language development as outlined by the speech clinician. Paraprofessionals should not assume full responsibility for diagnostic or educational services. Kansas districts have been reimbursed for employing approved paraprofessionals. In work with severely handicapped deaf blind programs, paraprofessionals function in instructional, administrative, classroom maintenance, and clerical roles. (CL)

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The Kansas Facilitator Paraprofessional Training Program: A New Perspective for a Statewide Network for the Special Education Paraprofessional Working in Severely Multiply Handicapped/Deaf-Blind Programs in the 80's

by Carolyn Shelton
Assistant Director, Kansas Facilitator Paraprofessional Training Program
Kansas State Department of Education, Topeka, Kansas
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The purpose of this session is to focus on the roles and responsibilities of the special education paraprofessional, legal issues involved with special education paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals working with severely multiply handicapped/deaf-blind students.

BACKGROUND

The state of Kansas is the only state in the country that employs two full-time staff members who work with special education paraprofessionals. Webster's Dictionary defines the "para" by stating that a "para: refers to one who serves along side of. . ." So it is that in Kansas the paraprofessional is one who works along side of and under the supervision of the special education teacher. The history of the paraprofessional program in Kansas began in 1974. In 1974, the Kansas State Department of Education employed a special education program specialist to promulgate the "standards" and develop and administer the approval process mandated by the statute. To date, no other state department has established program personnel responsible for paraprofessionals. The first one-year paraprofessional training grant was established in 1976-77. In 1978, the State Board stipulated that the approval process for paraprofessionals be included in the State Plan. Since 1977, the parsprofessional project has been funded on two additional three-year cycles; that is, from June 1977-June 1980 and from June 1980-June 1984. During FY83 the paraprofessional grant was funded at the level of $73,800.00, with additional funding available through P.L. 94-142 (VIB) funds for inservice training.

Initially, training in the state of Kansas was provided by the project director. Inherent in this concept was the idea that the project director could train paraprofessionals singlehandedly and that direct communication between paraprofessionals could be established between the Kansas State Department of Education and the paraprofessionals.

As the "trainer of trainers" concept of training paraprofessionals grew, the quality and quantity of inservice training also increased. In 1976, there were 40 participating districts and 101 workshops were conducted. In 1983, there were 70 participating districts and over 700 workshops were conducted. Numbers of paraprofessionals serving special education students in Kansas also grew. In 1977-78, there were 1,179 special education paraprofessionals in Kansas; in 1983, the number of paraprofessionals climbed to over 2,300; such an increase may be due to existing state reimbursement for paraprofessionals.

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PARAPROFESSIONAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

In discussing the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, it is important that we begin by looking at the role of the teacher. The teacher is responsible for the design and implementation of the IEP, for evaluation and the diagnosis of students and for classroom management and the development of lesson plans.

It is important for paraprofessionals to remember that they do have a role in designing the instructional process through the input that they give the teaching staff. Paraprofessionals are instructional in nature under the guidance of the classroom teacher, that is, they teach large and small group sessions under the direction of the classroom teacher. While paraprofessionals do not write lesson plans, they do have a role in implementing them. Likewise diagnosis and evaluation are areas where the paraprofessional assists the classroom teacher through open lines of communication and a mutual sharing of ideas. In the area of classroom management it is hoped that the paraprofessional will help to carry out classroom management policies that have been established by the classroom teacher.

Many paraprofessional duties may be described as "acceptable" or "unacceptable" for paraprofessionals. Acceptable responsibilities for paraprofessionals include the following:

The instructional paraprofessional may:

1. Assist in organizing field trips.
2. Read aloud or listen to children read.
3. Assist students in performing activities that have been initiated by the teacher.
4. Hand out papers and collect paper work.
5. Assist with supplementary work for advanced pupils.
6. Provide special help such as drilling with flash cards, spelling, and play activities.
7. Assist in preparing instructional materials.
8. Reinforce learning with small groups.
9. Assist children in learning their names, addresses, telephone numbers, birthdays, and parents' names.
10. Supervise free play activities.
11. Prepare flash cards and charts.
12. Prepare art supplies and other materials.
13. Hear requests for help, observe learning difficulties from pupils, and report such matters to teachers.
14. Score objective tests and papers and keep appropriate records for teachers.
15. Escort children on educational trips outside the classroom with the teacher and other appropriate adult support.
16. Assist in educational demonstrations for the class or small groups.
17. Support the teacher in the areas of sewing, cooking, industrial arts, and physical education.
18. Assist in setting up learning centers.
19. Provide assistance with individualized programmed materials.
20. Work with individual students or small groups on language development as outlined by the speech clinician.

(This list is not all-inclusive)

Unacceptable paraprofessional duties and responsibilities include the following:

The instructional paraprofessional:

1. Shall not be solely responsible for a classroom or a professional service.
2. Shall not be responsible for the diagnostic and programming functions of the classroom.
3. Shall not be responsible for preparing lesson plans and initiating original concept instruction.
4. Shall not grade subjective or essay tests.
5. Shall not be responsible for assigning grades to a student.
6. Shall not be used as a substitute for certified teachers unless he possesses the appropriate substitute teacher's certificate.
7. Shall not assume full responsibility for supervising assemblies or field trips.
8. Shall not regulate pupil behavior by corporal punishment or similar disciplinary means.
9. Shall not treat injuries or other medical needs of children without permission from appropriate personnel.
10. Shall not be assigned to work with the most "difficult" students the majority of the day in a "babysitting-type" of arrangement.

Paraprofessional program visits are conducted by Kansas State Department of Education personnel. Twenty-five percent (25%) of the districts/cooperatives/special purpose schools in Kansas are visited each year. During these visits paraprofessionals are asked to divide their time by percentiles into activities that are instructional, supervisory, and clerical. Because paraprfessionals in Kansas are defined as being instructional in nature, it is anticipated that the highest percentile will fall into the instructional category.

LEGAL ISSUES

Specifically, K.S.A. 1976 Supplement 72-962 defines the "special teacher" as follows:

> "Special teacher" means a person employed by a school district for special services who is: (1) a teacher qualified to instruct exceptional children as determined by standards established by the State Board and who is so certified by the State Board; or (2) a paraprofessional qualified to assist certificated teaachers in the instruction of exceptional children as determined by standards established by the State Board and who is so approved by the State Board.

House Bill number 1672, as K.S.A. 1976 Supp. 72-978, also provided for reimbursement to school districts for employing approved paraprofessionals. Each paraprofessional was to be counted as "one-half unit full time equivalent" special teacher.

Other Kansas legislation related to paraprofessionals includes the following:

K.S.A. 72-1106 (1975 S.B. 29, 1 and 1975 H.B. 2272, 1) as amended by Senate Bill No. 830.

> Section 1,(d) Time reserved for staff development or inservice training programs for the purpose of improving staff skills, developing competency in new or highly specialized fields, improving instructional techniques, or curriculum planning and study may be considered part of the school day for an aggregate amount of time equal to the amount of time in excess of the school year which is scheduled by a board of education for similar activities.
>
> Section 1,(e) Boards of education may employ noncertificated personnel to supervise pupils for noninstructional activities.

K.S.A. 72-1390 (L. 1947, ch. 362, 3; L. 1969, ch. 317, 6; April 25) Payment of salaries unlawful.

> It should be unlawful for the board of education of any school district to issue an order for payment of the salary of any certificated employee who does not hold a certificate which is valid in the state of Kansas for the particular kind of work to be performed.

K.S.A. 72-7513 (1974 H.B. 1556, Sec. 1) Certification of health for all persons, form and contents: expense of school employee.

> The school board shall require all persons, whether employees, student teachers, or practicum student teachers, who come in regular classroom contact with the pupils of a school district, to submit a certification of health signed by a licensed physician on a form prescribed by the Kansas state board of health ...

K.S.A. 72-67-60 (1974 S.B. 758, Sec. 1) Boards of education: negotiate for lowest prices.

> No expenditures involving an amount greater than one thousand dollars ($1,000) shall be made by the board of education of any school district, except in accordance with the provisions of a written contract.

Legal concerns often focus on paraprofessionals working in classrooms for short periods of time while the classroom teacher is unavoidably away from the classroom. Generally speaking, the paraprofessional is not legally responsible if another classroom teacher or the principal is serving in a supervisory role.

THE PARAPROFESSIONAL WORK IN SMH/DEAF-BLIND PROGRAMS.

There are four areas where paraprofessionals working in SMH/Deaf-Blind Programs provide assistance. These areas include the following:

1. Instructional
2. Administrative
3. Classroom Maintenance
4. Clerical

In the area of instruction, paraprofessionals can assist with self-help skills, communication skills, cognitive skills, preacademics, academics, motor programming such as positioning and handling, behavior management, prevocational vocational skills, and daily living training. Paraprofessionals provide one-to-one training as well as group instruction. Also paraprofessionals provide assistance in the selection of materials for specific programs, participating in written instructional programs, and participation in recording and graphing data and in making program decisions based on graph data.

In the area of classroom administration, paraprofessionals participate in developing an appropriate and workable classroom schedule, in planning field trips and in keeping student notebooks up-to-date. Paraprofessionals may be quite capable of updating material contained in student notebooks.

Classroom maintenance activities may consist of custodial tasks such as laundry, dishes, cleaning the mats and sweeping the floor. Decorating the classroom is another area where paraprofessionals may assist classroom teachers.

Clerical activities for paraprofessionals may include filling out forms and operating equipment located in the office such as ditto machines, xeroxing equipment, laminating equipment, etc. Teachers should be responsible for providing inservice for paraprofessionals relating to the type of equipment available in the classroom and how it is to be utilized.

CONCLUSION

In Kansas, we have had several themes on the state level. These include the following: "Paras Care," "Paras Are Real Assets," "Caring, Sharing Paras" and "Together We Can in Kansas." Webster's Dictionary defines an asset as "an advantage or a resource." The 2,300 paraprofessionals in the state of Kansas have very specific roles and responsibilities in the special education classroom. Due to Kansas legislation, paraprofessionals serve in an instructional capacity under the direction of the classroom teacher. In the categorical area of Severely Multiply Handicapped, paraprofessionals work in an instructional, administrative, clerical and custodial capacity. Clearly, paraprofessionals perform a viable role in SMH/Deaf-Blind Programs in the 80's.

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